

VZCZCXRO6849
OO RUEHIK
DE RUEHFR #0076/01 0251233
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 251233Z JAN 10
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8121
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 000076

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [KDEM](#) [OIIP](#) [FR](#) [HA](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR RIVKIN ENGAGES ON HAITI AS FRENCH
OFFICIALS HIGHLIGHT COOPERATION WITH U.S.

REF: A. STATE 005277
[1](#)B. PARIS 65

PARIS 00000076 001.2 OF 003

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Reinforcing the Secretary's message (ref A), Ambassador Rivkin engaged directly with over 100 French journalists in an event streamed live on-line by CNN where he highlighted U.S. assistance to Haiti and the cooperation of the United States with France, the UN, and the international community. Embassy Paris has also reached out to senior officials in the Elysee and MFA, as well as French press and civil society at all levels to underscore the message of positive coordination with our French partners and to set the record straight on the work of the USG in Haiti. Dismissing rumors of rising diplomatic tensions between the United States and France, leading government officials have consistently praised the work of the Obama administration on the ground and defended the need for a strong U.S. role in the emergency response. Following Junior Cooperation Minister Alain Joyandet's January 16 criticisms of the U.S. role in Haiti, the Ambassador, DCM, Political and Public Affairs section staff engaged with counterparts from the office of the President to the Foreign Minister and major French media outlets. Major French media outlets generally have rejected the politicization of the relief effort and asserted their support for "indispensable" U.S. assistance. On January 20, Joyandet publicly corrected the record on the American presence in Haiti. END SUMMARY.

AMBASSADOR RIVKIN LEADS EMBASSY PARIS ENGAGEMENT ON HAITI

[1](#)2. (SBU) Since the news of the earthquake reached France, Ambassador Rivkin, the Public Affairs (PA) Section and other sections at Embassy Paris have been actively engaged in publicly explaining what the USG is doing in support of the Haitian people. On January 13, deputy press officer Detmeister appeared on France 24 in both English and French services to provide details of the immediate USG response. On January 14, Ambassador Rivkin outlined USG efforts in the wake of the earthquake at a background breakfast with leading French journalists. Ambassador Rivkin took the opportunity to reiterate the closeness of the Franco-American collaboration in the relief efforts in front of former FM Hubert Vedrine, Junior Minister for Europe Pierre Lellouche, and National Assembly Foreign Policy Committee Chair Axel Poniatowski while participating in an on-the-record round table co-hosted by CNN (Jim Bittermann) and the French journal L'Express on January 20. More than 100 journalists, including those who blogged in, heard Ambassador Rivkin emphasize the importance of close coordination with France to the success of the emergency response and future reconstruction of Haiti. His positive assessment of the cooperation between France and the U.S. was fully endorsed by his three fellow panelists. "Speaking for the government of France," Lellouche went out of his way to praise U.S.-French cooperation in Haiti and also cautioned

the media and journalists present against turning attention from the work at hand. These comments were echoed by former Foreign Minister Vedrine.

FRENCH OFFICIALS HIGHLIGHT FRANCO-AMERICAN COOPERATION

13. (SBU) In a televised address from the French island of Mayotte on January 19, President Sarkozy highlighted "the exceptional mobilization of President Obama and the American administration," praising the role the U.S. has played with France in the relief effort as "essential." Sarkozy underscored the spirit of cooperation, saying that "today, (France and the United States) are confronting, together, a humanitarian emergency...tomorrow it is together that we will mobilize the international community to respond to the enormous reconstruction needs." The Office of the French President had released a statement earlier that day emphasizing that "French authorities are entirely satisfied with the cooperation between our two countries and beyond that, with the permanent coordination between the crisis centers of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the American Department of State. The Elysee applauds the exceptional mobilization of the United States for Haiti's sake and the essential role that (the U.S.) plays on the ground." The clarification amplified and expanded on comments made by Presidency chief of staff Claude Gueant, who welcomed the management of the Port-au-Prince airport by the U.S. military in a statement on January 18. For his part, Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner tamped down speculation of a diplomatic rift, stating that "what is important is the fate of the Haitians" and reiterated on January 18 that France is happy to work "hand-in-hand" with the United States. Former Prime Minister from the Socialist Party Lionel Jospin rebutted accusations by Hugo Chavez that the American military was

PARIS 00000076 002.2 OF 003

trying to occupy Haiti as "groundless."

CORRECTING THE RECORD: JOYANDET NOW "REJOICES" OVER U.S. PRESENCE IN HAITI

14. (SBU) The positive MFA and official statements of cooperation were designed to correct stories suggesting a diplomatic rift between France and the U.S., which began circulating on January 16 after Secretary of State for Cooperation Alain Joyandet sparked controversy when he told the press in Haiti that he had lodged an official complaint after American air traffic controllers, who had assumed control at Port-au-Prince airport, turned back two French Airbus planes carrying a field hospital and medical staff. The French MFA spokesperson Bernard Valero countered Joyandet's January 16 statement on the same day, clarifying that "there has been no protest by the French government on the subject of managing the airport in Port-au-Prince." Joyandet was again quoted on January 18, speaking to Europe 1 radio from an emergency EU ministerial meeting on Haiti in Brussels, asking the UN to "clarify" the American role in Haiti and saying that "this is about helping Haiti, not about occupying Haiti." FM Kouchner spoke personally to Ambassador Rivkin on January 19, repudiating the supposed dissatisfaction of the U.S. relief efforts by Joyandet and reiterating GOF appreciation of USG efforts. Finally, in an interview with RFI on January 20, Joyandet backed away from his previous remarks concerning the U.S. and its role in leading disaster relief in Haiti by saying that "we can only rejoice" over the American presence. Saying that he has "repeatedly welcomed our American friends," Joyandet credited the U.S. military for opening the Port-au-Prince airport "very quickly." He dismissed reports of his formal complaint as just "some of the technical challenges" during a "moment of difficulty in the early hours of coordination," emphasizing that what matters most now is the coordination between the U.S. and France on the ground.

DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENT

15. (SBU) Embassy Paris has been in close contact with the Elysee and MFA regarding the initial statements and those issued subsequently by senior officials. Ambassador Rivkin has spoken with FM Kouchner and senior officials at the Elysee. Other senior officials also maintained an active dialogue to clarify French views and urge that public statements accurately reflect American actions. While the vast majority of French media have correspondents in Washington and in Haiti and are reporting based on their information and wire coverage, Embassy Paris is providing additional information to contacts in France in an effort to inform the coverage, which has generally been balanced and positive. The Political Section maintains daily contact with the MFA Haiti desk to facilitate information sharing on joint humanitarian assistance and prospective reconstruction. Contacts at the MFA Crisis Center continue to report productive exchanges with the State Department Operations Center Task Force. Over the past year, the U.S. embassy provided one exchange diplomat to the French crisis center and promoted exchanges with State Ops personnel, which appear to have been helpful in coordinating responses to this current crisis. On the cultural side, PA organized a commemoration event on January 18 for the lives lost in the Haitian earthquake and is using new media, including the Embassy web site and Facebook page, to share the latest information regarding USG efforts to assist the Haitian people.

FRENCH PRESS POSITIVE ON U.S. ROLE

16. (SBU) Characterizing Joyandet's January 16 remarks as "overblown" and "not characteristic of the situation," French press coverage has in fact been positive overall and has not focused on any alleged problems in coordination between the U.S. and France, but rather has been critical of Joyandet's outburst. An editorial in center-right Le Figaro on January 19 described the decisive action by President Obama in response to the earthquake as a "positive sign" signaling the "irreplaceable role of the United States in the world." Independent news website Rue89.com bemoaned the embarrassing display of "national egos" on January 18 while financial daily La Tribune defended the U.S. actions as "nothing shocking" given its geographic proximity and close ties to Haiti on January 18. However, left-of-center daily Liberation expressed concern for Haiti's sovereignty, insisting that France not "abandon" Haiti to "U.S. influence" on January 20. The Public Affairs section at Embassy Paris directly addressed the Joyandet statements with French media

PARIS 00000076 003.2 OF 003

outlets, who focused on highlighting successful cooperation.
RIVKIN